

APPARATUS AND METHODS FOR PROVIDING WORKSPACE PRIVACY

DESCRIPTION OF THE INVENTION

Field of the Invention

[001] The present invention relates to apparatus and methods for providing privacy, and more specifically, providing privacy for an individual at a workspace.

Background of the Invention

[002] As used herein, the term “work” may comprise any activity performed by an individual or a group of individuals, and the term “workspace” may comprise any space for performing such work. Examples of work may include seeing, listening, observing, analyzing, thinking, reading, writing, drawing, entering data and the like, wherever performed, such as at a learning institution, e.g., a school or at a place of employment, and for whatever purpose, such as intellectual, business or pleasure.

[003] Success in one’s work is desirable, and the ability to succeed is enhanced by effective concentration. There are, however, a number of obstacles to one’s ability to concentrate on their work. Such obstacles may comprise any type of distraction, including visual and/or aural distractions. In a school setting, for example, there are a number of potential distractions.

[004] Generally, a student may be distracted from working efficiently due to anything she sees and/or hears emanating from outside her workspace, e.g., from neighboring students. For example, if a student can see the work of a neighboring student, she may be tempted to see who is ahead on the assignment or to copy. Such on-looking tends to distract the on-looking student and may also distract other students.

[005] Another source of classroom distraction results from a student speaking out loud to inform her teacher that she has completed an assignment. Moreover, as other students speak out or raise their hands to report completion of an assignment, the magnitude of distraction grows for those having not yet completed the assignment. A teacher may alleviate this source of distraction by instructing her students not to make such reports. Even then, however, the teacher may still ask the class if everyone is done with the assignment, an announcement that may similarly distract those students still working.

[006] Yet another source of classroom distraction results from a student misplacing her writing instrument, such as a pen, pencil, crayon or the like. Often the student announces her loss to the class, which may distract her peers if work is in progress. Other students may also start looking for the lost instrument, adding to the source of distraction.

[007] U.S. Patent 3,326,147 to *Toney* discloses a desk screen that may be used in a classroom, however, its shortcomings are numerous. For example, *Toney* discloses that before the desk screen can be used, it should be connected to a desk using one or more mechanisms. Such connection may be difficult and time consuming, particularly in a classroom with younger or mechanically-challenged students. The *Toney* desk screen is also difficult to handle and to store.

[008] Thus, there was a need for apparatus and methods of using the same to provide workspace privacy in a manner that overcomes these and other shortcomings of the related art.

SUMMARY OF THE INVENTION

[009] In accordance with an embodiment of the invention, an apparatus is disclosed for providing privacy for an individual at a workspace. The apparatus may comprise a front panel, a first side panel coupled to a first portion of the front panel and a second side panel coupled to a second portion of the front panel. The panels may have a first configuration wherein the panels may stand on a surface of the workspace to provide the privacy and a second configuration wherein the panels may be folded along the first portion of the front panel and the second portion of the front panel.

[010] In accordance with another embodiment of the invention, a method is disclosed for providing privacy for an individual at a workspace. The method may comprise providing a front panel, providing a first side panel coupled to a first portion of the front panel and providing a second side panel coupled to a second portion of the front panel. The panels may have a first configuration wherein the panels may stand on a surface of the workspace to provide the privacy and a second configuration wherein the panels may be folded along the first portion of the front panel and the second portion of the front panel.

[011] In accordance with yet another embodiment of the invention, a method is disclosed for providing privacy for an individual at a workspace. The method may comprise providing a member having a plurality of configurations, including a first configuration wherein the member may stand on a surface of the workspace to provide the privacy and a second configuration wherein the member may be folded.

[012] Additional objects and advantages of the invention will be set forth in part in the description which follows, and in part will be obvious from the description, or may

be learned by practice of the invention. The objects and advantages of the invention will be realized and attained by means of the elements and combinations particularly pointed out in the appended claims.

[013] It is to be understood that both the foregoing general description and the following detailed description are exemplary and explanatory only and are not restrictive of the invention, as claimed.

[014] The accompanying drawings, which are incorporated in and constitute a part of this specification, illustrate several embodiments of the invention and together with the description, serve to explain the principles of the invention.

BRIEF DESCRIPTION OF THE DRAWINGS

[015] Figure 1 is a perspective view of a screen on a desk occupied by a student, in accordance with apparatus and methods consistent with the present invention.

[016] Figure 1A is a perspective view of several screens on a desk occupied by several students, in accordance with apparatus and methods consistent with the present invention.

[017] Figure 2 is a perspective view of the back side of the screen of Figures 1 and 1A, in accordance with apparatus and methods consistent with the present invention.

[018] Figure 2A is a perspective view of the front side of the screen of Figure 2, in accordance with apparatus and methods consistent with the present invention.

[019] Figure 2B is a perspective view of a portion within the circled region “A” on the screen in Figure 2, in accordance with apparatus and methods consistent with the present invention.

[020] Figure 2C is a perspective view showing a variation to the portion within the circled region “A” on the screen in Figure 2, in accordance with apparatus and methods consistent with the present invention.

[021] Figure 2D is a side elevation view of the screen in Figure 2 folded into a stack, in accordance with apparatus and methods consistent with the present invention.

[022] Figure 3 is a perspective view of the back side of a variation of the screen of Figure 2, in accordance with apparatus and methods consistent with the present invention.

[023] Figure 3A is a perspective view of the front side of the screen of Figure 3, in accordance with apparatus and methods consistent with the present invention.

DESCRIPTION OF THE EMBODIMENTS

[024] Reference will now be made in detail to the present exemplary embodiments of the invention, examples of which are illustrated in the accompanying drawings. Wherever possible, the same reference numbers will be used throughout the drawings to refer to the same or like parts.

[025] Referring to Figure 1, a student 12 sits on a chair 16 in front of a desk 14 having a work surface 18. Standing on work surface 18 is a screen 10. Screen 10 may provide privacy for student 12 and limit potential distractions to student 12 by restricting what student 12 may see and/or hear emanating from beyond work surface 18. Screen 10 may stand on desk 14 without requiring connection to any other structure, such as

desk 14, however, if desired, screen 10 may be connected to other such structures using any conventional technique.

[026] Referring to Figure 1A, several students 12 sit on chairs 16 in front of a desk 14 having a work surface 18. Standing on work surface 18 are screens 10 for each student 12. Screens 10 may provide privacy for each student 12 and limit potential distractions to each student 12 by restricting what each student 12 may see and/or hear emanating from beyond his or her respective portion of work surface 18.

[027] Referring to Figure 2, a perspective view is shown of the back side of screen 10, the side facing students 12 in Figures 1 and 1A. Screen 10 may serve to provide privacy for student 12 and limit potential distractions to student 12 by restricting what student 12 may see and/or hear emanating from beyond work surface 18. Any structure suitable for performing such purposes may be employed for screen 10.

[028] In the embodiment of Figure 2, screen 10 may include a front panel 22, a side panel 20 and a side panel 24. Panels 20-24 may serve to provide privacy for each student 12 and limit potential distractions to each student 12 by restricting what each student 12 may see and/or hear emanating from beyond his or her respective portion of work surface 18. Any structure suitable for performing such purposes may be employed, however, panels 20-24 may be fabricated using any suitably sturdy, yet lightweight material, such as a tag board, a poster board, any plastic-type sheet and the like, whether or not laminated. The size and shape of panels 20-24 may be selected to provide any desired measure of screening for student 12. In one embodiment, one or more of panels 20-24 may each comprise a rectangular-shaped panel which may have a length greater than 150 millimeters and a height greater than 75 millimeters.

[029] A layer 26 may cover portions of panels 20-24 to couple them together and/or to add structural integrity to screen 10. Any material suitable for these purposes may be employed for layer 26, such as a laminate, laminated paper, any plastic-type sheet and the like. An adhesive may be included as part of or applied to an attachment surface of layer 26 for attachment to panels 20-24. While layer 26 is shown covering completely the back side of panels 20-24, more limited coverage of layer 26 may be employed, for example, providing one or more strips of layer 26 along adjoining edges of panels 20-24 to couple panels 20-24. Layer 26 may also serve as a surface for displaying marking 30, and when so employed, any material suitable for such purpose may be selected, such as a laminate, laminated paper, any plastic-type sheet and the like.

[030] In one embodiment marking 30 may comprise one or more goals for student 12, which may be written, revised and displayed on layer 26 using an appropriate writing instrument, such as an erasable marker. Appropriate use of goals may serve as a useful motivating tool for a teacher. A writing instrument 34, such as a pencil, pen, crayon or marker may be conveniently stored in a retainer 32 for retaining the writing instrument 34. Any structure suitable for serving this retaining purpose may be employed, such as attaching to layer 26 any suitable material 32 to form a pocket between material 32 and layer 26.

[031] A rotatable member 31 may be coupled to any of panels 20-24 to enable student 12 to silently report to the teacher when an assignment is complete. For example, having member 31 retracted and out of site from the teacher may be intended to report that work is ongoing. When student 12 has completed the assignment, she

may rotate member 31 to an upright position visible to the teacher, thereby reporting completion of the assignment without making an announcement that could disturb other students that had not yet completed the assignment. Alternatively, an electronic visual indicator may be employed to silently report completion of an assignment.

[032] Referring to Figure 2A, a perspective view is shown of the front side of screen 10, the side facing away from students 12 in Figures 1 and 1A. A layer 28 may cover portions of panels 20-24 to couple them together and/or to add structural integrity to screen 10. Any material suitable for these purposes may be employed for layer 28, such as a laminate, laminated paper, any plastic-type sheet and the like. While layer 28 is shown covering completely the front side of panels 20-24, more limited coverage of layer 28 may be employed, for example, providing one or more strips of layer 28 along adjoining edges of panels 20-24 to couple panels 20-24. Layer 28 may also serve as a surface for displaying marking 36, and when so employed, any material suitable for such purpose may be selected, such as a laminate, laminated paper, any plastic-type sheet and the like. Marking 36 may comprise the name of student 12, which may be written, revised and displayed on layer 28 using an appropriate writing instrument, such as an erasable marker. Displaying the student's name on the front of screen 10 may help a teacher learn her student's names. A retainer 38 may also be employed for retaining an award 40 earned by student 12. Any structure suitable for serving this retaining purpose may be employed, such as attaching to layer 28 any suitable material 38 to form a pocket between material 38 and layer 28. Rewarding student achievement is a useful motivational tool for a teacher.

[033] Referring to Figure 2B, a close-up view of a portion “A” on screen 10 showing coupling of panels 22 and 24 by layer 26. Such coupling may be similarly used along the adjoining edges, or portions thereof, between panels 20 and 22. Additionally, layer 28 (not shown) may similarly serve to couple panels 20-24. However, those skilled in the art understand that it is not necessary that both layers 26 and 28 be utilized to couple panels 20-24, as a single layer could be utilized.

[034] Referring to Figure 2C, a close up view to a variation of portion “A” on screen 10 shows that panels 22 and 24 may be coupled together, without requiring one or more coupling layers 26 and/or 28. In Figure 2C, screen 10 may comprise a single, integral member that may be folded to demarcate panels 20-24. In the single-member embodiment of screen 10, one or more layers 26 and/or 28 may still be employed to add structural integrity and/or to provide one or more marking surfaces 30 and/or 36.

[035] Referring to Figure 2D, screen 10 is shown in lying on its front side. Side panels 20 and 24 have been folded toward front panel 22. When folded completely into a stack of panels 20-24, screen 10 may have a thickness of 3 millimeters or greater, which may be convenient for storage.

[036] Figures 3 and 3A show the back and front sides, respectively, of a variation of screen 10. Screen 10 of Figures 3 and 3A differs from screen 10 of Figures 2-2D in that it may take on a thematic silhouette, which is shown as a castle or fortress. The rotatable member 31 may also take on a thematic silhouette, which as shown is a flag. Such thematic silhouettes may be used to motivate students 12 that may find in them a source of inspiration.

[037] Other embodiments of the invention will be apparent to those skilled in the art from consideration of the specification and practice of the invention disclosed herein. It is intended that the specification and examples be considered as exemplary only, with a true scope and spirit of the invention being indicated by the following claims.